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Behind the Headlines

By Justin Raimondo

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ANTHRAX COVER-UP?

We know who the suspects are – so why no arrest?

The news that the US government has set up a special department, the "Office of Strategic Influence," to [plant false news items](#) has liberals and journalists (or do I repeat myself?) in a funk: this is *terrible*, they whine, why it's unprecedented. To which the only possible reply is: Oh *really*?

DISINFORMATION: A SHORT HISTORY

The US government has been playing the same game since the dawn of the cold war, when the [Congress of Cultural Freedom was run as a CIA operation](#) to influence

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world opinion in the struggle against the Soviet Union: A whole raft of ostensibly "private" individuals, such as Irving Kristol, a CCF stalwart, and assorted [other intellectuals-for-hire](#), were on the CIA payroll, although they may not have known it (or wanted to know it) at the time. The Agency cultivated "mainstream" journalists, planted news stories, and routinely used the media to mislead, misinform, and confuse. Do you mean the government is *lying* to us, scream the liberals, who are shocked – *shocked!* – that such a thing is possible. Fer chrissake, *what do you think they've been doing all along?*

THE BIG LIE

The US government is spreading lies. Why is this considered so unusual? After all, our entire foreign policy is based on a structure of lies, the central one being the inevitable beneficence and altruism of the United States as a world power; and this, in turn, is based on the Biggest Lie of Them All, the one that seeks to justify and explain every bit of self-aggrandizement on the part of our great and glorious leaders: the lie of "democracy," which rubberstamps, every four years or so, decisions that have already been made by those who really rule.

EMANATIONS OF UNTRUTH

So they're lying to us: but lies come in all sorts of colors and shades of prevarication, including the more subtle emanations of untruth that might be called lies of omission. Liars must always cover their tracks: indeed, government officials spend a lot of their time, energy – and your money – doing exactly that. It isn't what they're telling us that matters so much: any halfway conscious human being is smart enough to discount that right off the bat. It's what they're *not* telling us that counts.

GATE-KEEPERS

Of course, in this day and age, for a lie to go over, government officials must have at least the passive

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cooperation of journalists – or at least those relatively few gatekeepers who pretty much still determine what gets reported and what is relegated to the [Memory Hole](#). This doesn't mean that journalists are recruited to write lies, but, somehow, they know what *not* to write about.

TWO SPIKED STORIES

A good example is the four-part series on Fox News reporting on an extensive Israeli spy operation in the US that was discovered, apparently, prior to 9/11 – and [raising the possibility of Israeli foreknowledge of the attacks](#). After four days of one stunning revelation after another – the Israelis had penetrated US government communications systems, they had been watching Al Qaeda cells in the US, and had sent agents to penetrate US military facilities – the story dropped like a stone in a bottomless abyss, noiselessly and seemingly without leaving so much as a ripple of air in its wake. Another example: the story about how the stocks of certain companies with a 9/11 connection were [dramatically manipulated](#) in the days and hours prior to the attacks. Who profited? What became of the [promised Securities and Exchange Commission investigation](#)? So far we have heard not a peep out of the news media on this, nor has anyone in Congress bothered to ask questions.

AT LOOSE ENDS

But the most dramatic loose end left conspicuously hanging in the aftermath of 9/11 is undoubtedly the anthrax story. For a few weeks in October, and into November, the anthrax letters sent to media outlets and prominent elected officials were *the* top story: but when the attacks stopped, and the media ran out of scare stories on the possibilities of bio-terrorism (after all, how many documentaries about smallpox and ebola can you run without sending the audience fleeing?) the coverage sputtered out rather quickly, and soon came to a complete dead end. The investigation, too, seemed to have reached a similar blind alley: the authorities were baffled, or so they said. But they were lying: indeed, as the investigation proceeded, usually voluble government officials, eager to

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be seen as "on the job," were laconic in their public pronouncements. On November 19, John Bolton, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, averred that "We don't know...at the moment, in a way that we could make public, where the anthrax attacks came from."

Of course they can't make it public: because, at the very least, the truth points to their own incompetence and passive complicity. And, at worst ...

WHY THE FOOT-DRAGGING?

Barbara Hatch Rosenberg, director of the Federation of American Scientists' chemical and biological weapons program, [says the US government has "a strong hunch"](#) about who is behind the anthrax letters, but is "dragging its feet" in the investigation because the chief suspect is a former government scientist with knowledge of "secret activities that the government would not like to see disclosed." Rosenberg has written [a very interesting analysis](#) of the anthrax attacks that leads to one and only one ineluctable conclusion: that the chief culprit was not some Arab terrorist, associated with Al Qaeda or similar groups, but an American, a former US government employee – one who, furthermore, is a middle-aged "insider" in the biodefense field, with a doctoral degree, who probably worked in the [USAMRID](#) laboratory, at Fort Detrick, Maryland, still has access – and had some dispute with a government agency.

PLEASE TRY THIS AT HOME!

Furthermore, given the information compiled by Rosenberg, and with the aid of Google.com, anyone with computer access can identify *by name* the person or persons in possession of the key to unlocking the mystery of the anthrax attack.

POISON PEN

The strain of weaponised anthrax used in the attacks

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narrows the search for the perpetrator(s) down to a few US labs: but law enforcement agencies have yet to issue a single subpoena for employee records at the four labs with a history of working with this strain. We know about the anthrax letters, of course, and the several hoax letters, but a major clue in this investigation is an anonymous letter, sent before the anthrax hysteria, in late September, to the military police at the Marine base in Quantico, Virginia, accusing a US government bioengineer, Egyptian-born Dr. Ayaad Assaad, of being behind a bio-terrorist plot. The letter-writer revealed a detailed knowledge of Dr. Assaad's life and work at USAMRID, including details of his personal life that only someone who worked with him could have possibly known: indeed, the poison-pen author claimed to have formerly worked with Dr. Assaad.

FBI TAKES A PASS

While FBI spokesman Chris Murray confirmed that Assaad was not under suspicion, he also [stated to reporters](#) that the FBI is *not* trying to find out who sent the anonymous hate-letter – which the FBI won't show to Assaad. The odd timing of the letter – sent after the anthrax letters were mailed, but before their deadly contents were known – doesn't even have them mildly curious.

WHERE THE ANTHRAX TRAILS LEADS

Rosenberg believes that the poison-pen missive was written by the real perpetrator of the anthrax attacks, who sought to ride the wave of anti-Arab, anti-Muslim hysteria that swept the nation after 9/11. This also fits the pattern of masquerade that characterizes the anthrax letters to NBC, Daschle, Leahy, et al, with their anti-Israel, pro-Muslim slogans neatly printed in block letters. Indeed, the one thread that seems to run throughout this story is anti-Arab animus, as the astonishing – and truly frightening – story of what happened at Ft. Detrick in the early 1990s makes all too clear....

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IT CAME FROM FT. DETRICK

Things were turning up missing at AMRIID, and Lt. Col. Michael Langford was baffled. He suspected that someone was tampering with records, perhaps in order to conduct unauthorized research. He told a lab technician to "make a list of everything that was missing," and "it turned out that there was quite a bit of stuff that was unaccounted for," 27 sets of specimens, including anthrax, hanta virus, simian AIDS virus "and two that were labeled 'unknown' – an Army euphemism for classified research whose subject was secret," as [this chilling Hartford Courant story](#) by Jack Dolan and Dave Altimari puts it. One set of specimens has since been found: the rest are still missing....

CAUGHT ON TAPE

An investigation was launched that exposed the shockingly lax security measures at the lab, and raised the possibility that some specimens may never have been entered in lab records. Also uncovered was a tape from a surveillance camera showing the entry of an unauthorized person into the lab, at 8:40, on January 23, 1992, let in by Dr. Marian Rippey, lab pathologist. The night visitor was Lt. Col. Philip Zack, a former employee who had left as a result of a dispute with the lab over his alleged harassment of Dr. Assaad. The *Courant* reports:

"Zack left Fort Detrick in December 1991, after a controversy over allegations of unprofessional behavior by Zack, Rippey, [lab technician Charles] Brown and others who worked in the pathology division. They had formed a clique that was accused of harassing the Egyptian-born Assaad, who later sued the Army, claiming discrimination."

THE KAMEL KLUB KIDS

According to Assaad, in the week before Easter 1991, he found a poem in his mailbox, described in [another Courant story](#):

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"The poem, which became a court exhibit, has 235 lines, many of them lewd, mocking Assaad. The poem also refers to another creation of the scientists who wrote it — a rubber camel outfitted with sexually explicit appendages. The poem reads: 'In (Assaad's) honor we created this beast; it represents life lower than yeast.' The camel, it notes, each week will be given 'to who did the least.' The poem also doubles as an ode to each of the participants who adorned the camel, who number at least six and referred to themselves as 'the camel club.' Two — Dr. Philip Zack and Dr. Marian Rippy — voluntarily left Fort Detrick soon after Assaad brought the poem to the attention of supervisors."

Charming, eh? This kind of organized harassment has an ideological edge to it not completely attributable to personal antipathy, and seems politically inspired, a possibility that is intriguing given the political repercussions of the anthrax scare.

SULLIVAN SAYS: 'NUKE 'EM!'

Bill Kristol, of the *Weekly Standard*, was [positively gloating](#) that, after years of neoconservative hectoring — and with little to show for it [except a few hundred thousand dead Iraqi babies](#) — the anthrax attacks had finally put the "get Iraq" lobby over the top in Washington: the Iraqis, he exulted, would now get what was coming to them. But Andrew Sullivan, for his part, wasn't content with a mere bombing campaign or even an invasion: Writing in his "[weblog](#)" for October 17 [01], he demanded that we nuke 'em without waiting for the evidence:

"At this point, it seems to me that a refusal to extend the war to Iraq is not even an option. We have to extend it to Iraq. It is by far the most likely source of this weapon; it is clearly willing to use such weapons in the future; and no war against terrorism of this kind can be won without dealing decisively with the Iraqi threat. We no longer have any choice in the matter."

I guess he must've taken an [overdose of testosterone](#) that day: what is astonishing is that, after having made such an obviously deranged statement in all seriousness, he was ever taken seriously by anyone again. Instead, he has been

lionized and touted as the living incarnation of George Orwell – a truly Orwellian claim, considering his recent defense of the Office of Strategic Influence plan to spread lies far and wide:

"Those kinds of lies are often necessary to ensure the success of military strikes, and pose no threat to the credibility of the American government or the domestic press."

What kind of lies Sullivan tells himself in order to evade the overwhelming evidence of his complete moral bankruptcy is open to speculation. But of one thing we can be sure: he has by now completely forgotten what he wrote about the anthrax attacks and the alleged moral imperative of immediately reducing an entire nation to a nuclearized cinder. As I wrote in a column some months ago:

"It kind of reminds me of the idiot who killed a turban-wearing immigrant from India, because, as he told his wife, 'all Arabs should be shot.' When the cops came to his Phoenix home to arrest him, he reportedly said: 'I'm an American. Arrest me and let those terrorists run wild?'"
The differences between this drunken sub-literate wife-beating fool and the literary wonder boy of the neocon set are superficial: morally, they are brothers under the skin – though at least the Arizona knuckle-dragger had the courage to act on his murderous convictions. All Sullivan can do is write in his little weblog – and thank God for that!"

OMINOUS PARALLELS

There is an ominous and telling parallel with the 9/11 investigation here: that's another instance in which the authorities are being extra careful not to dig too deeply, at least in public. For the anthrax sub-plot was almost like an afterthought to the main mystery of 9/11: how did an underground terrorist network manage to operate in the US for as long as five years, and perhaps more, without being detected by law enforcement agencies? Multiple agencies of government were laden with multi-billion dollar budgets earmarked for "anti-terrorist" activities, yet they knew nothing of this operation, had not even a hint. The CIA and other intelligence agencies aren't to blame, says CIA

director George Tenant, who testified before Congress that "intelligence will never give you 100 percent predictive capability."

Yeah, but how about 50 percent, or 30 percent? Perhaps even as much as 10 percent intelligence might have changed the course of events, and prevented or at least ameliorated the biggest terrorist attack in US history. At any rate, [the investigation isn't going anywhere](#), no doubt for the same reasons the FBI refuses to move on the anthrax case: too much embarrassing and potentially explosive information could get out, exposing the US government – or, perhaps, one of its closest allies – as criminally negligent or even complicit in the attacks.

A DOMESTIC OPERATION?

Evidence that Saddam Hussein was the mastermind behind the anthrax attacks has failed to materialize: the evidence, and official suspicions, all point to a domestic operation. But that doesn't rule out an overseas connection. Iraq isn't the only foreign intelligence service that has the resources, methods, and most importantly the *motive* to pull off a stunt clearly designed to spread fear throughout the land – and provoke a violent American military response. The mystery, to this day, remains unsolved – and, if you don't believe that, then you'd better pay a visit to the Office of Strategic Influence. I'm sure they'd be more than glad to straighten you out....

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